

- **Belmont Warrant Committee Meeting Minutes**

- **FINAL**

- **January 27, 2010, 7:30 p.m.**

- **Board of Selectmen Meeting Room, Town Hall**

- Present: Chair Curtis; Members Allison, Becker, Brusch, Callanan, Dash, Epstein, Libenson, Lynch, Manjikian, McLaughlin, Millane, Smith and SC Chair Rittenburg

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- Members Absent: Hofmann and Paolillo

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- The meeting was called to order at 7:41 pm by Chair Curtis.

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- This meeting was focused on training and budget preparation for all Warrant Committee members.

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- ***Role of the Individual Warrant Committee Member***

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- Chair Curtis reviewed the basics: WC members are appointed by the Town Moderator to create the budget, and to recommend to TM a balanced budget. The WC does not speak on behalf of a particular constituency. It should be critical of the budget. The WC should understand the budgets of the departments that it has jurisdiction over. Again, WC members don't advocate for a department — but it is OK to vote one way as a WC member and another way as a TM member. Member Becker asked what role the public plays at WC meetings. Curtis answered: none, unless recognized by the Chair. He explained that he will call on individuals, e.g., Treasurer Carman, DPH Director Castanino, etc. not to express an opinion, but rather to edify the WC when appropriate.

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- Member McLaughlin offered that the approach ought not to be antiseptic, that WC members ought to be able to apply their own expertise. Member Callanan said that the WC is criticized by the community for being closed off. When, she asked, does the public get a chance to voice an opinion to the WC?

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- Member Smith noted that the WC had made a policy decision regarding the budget split which the “elected bodies” then contributed to the ensuing conversation. The override question will be biggest decision the WC makes this year, as that is the escape hatch, said Member McLaughlin. Let the people decide if they want to pay more in taxes or lose a lot of services. Member Allison: budgets need to be systematically reviewed and analyzed. If the WC doesn't do this review and analysis, it won't get done.

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- ***Role of the Subcommittee (with PowerPoint presentation on subcommittee report format by member Allison)***

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- Member Allison began with the Town's organization chart. There are two people that report to the Town Administrator: Town Accountant Hagg and DPW Director Castanino. The WC needs to do analysis of the budget, as the department heads generally report to varied people and not to one place, and the Town does not have a budget analyst.

- **The Subcommittee Report**

- Each WC Subcommittee Report will have 8 parts:

- I. Introduction to the Department
- II. Spending Overview (big picture)
- III. Programmatic Analysis
- IV. Expense Analysis
- V. Special Analysis
- VI. Analysis of Cuts and Adds
- VII. Longer Term Issues
- VIII . Observations and Recommendations

- The report should show what percent this budget is of the entire town budget. Using the Fire Department as an example, she noted that their budget is 6% of the entire budget. She also advised that the report contain a section on what this department is doing that is new this year – this will show long term trends and growth (e.g., 5.5% for Fire). Allison suggested that the report's Programmatic Analysis section show budgets by programs, activity indicators broken down as useful ("disaggregating"), and performance indicators. For example, the Fire Department had approximately 3200 calls, but very few of those pertain to fires. We need to understand where the activity takes place and begin to see if budget allocations correspond to the activities of that department. As for performance indicators for the Fire Department, one would look at response time and look at the cost of a fire. For expense analysis, one looks at budget line items: is 10% of the budget growing at more than 3%? Analyzing "special issues" will help generate ideas unique to a department. For example, since false alarms are a major drain on the FD's resources, we may want to impose a cost-based fee on an entity generating multiple false alarms. Through this analysis, one learns that Belmont pays more for fire suppression (with few actual fires) than fire prevention.

- ***Detailed Look at the Budget Calendar***

- Chair Curtis: Next week, we will hear from Treasurer Carman to review town reserves, the bond rating, and various buckets of reserves. On the 10<sup>th</sup>, Superintendent Entwistle will present the School budget and Town Administrator Younger will present the Town budget. At that point, we will have the school and town numbers which we will evaluate against available revenues. The 17<sup>th</sup> will be a working meeting. The subcommittees will convene to analyze the budgets. Member Bruschi noted that the 17<sup>th</sup> was both school vacation week and Wellington move week.

- April 5<sup>th</sup> is the town election, Curtis continued, and we would need to know by the end of February (with almost no data) about an override on the ballot. The question was raised: what is the BoS argument for placing the override question on the April general election? Member Allison postulated that perhaps it would be better to know early whether or not people want to pay more taxes or lose services. SC Chair Rittenburg noted that some had concerns with the fairness of holding override votes during special elections rather than as part of the general election. She also observed that we could ask for a subset of the deficit – e.g., \$2.5M – and ask for it earlier. We must state clearly what’s going to be lost, and Member Epstein added that this will require a very significant education campaign as the average citizen does not understand the budget. Member Millane said that fixed income seniors are ready to move out of Belmont because they can’t afford to spend any more on taxes. The WC was unanimous in the need to be very clear on what will be eliminated without an override. Member Allison added that there is a long list of structural reforms that could save the town money as well, as opposed to tax hikes or cuts in essential services.

- Chair Curtis continued with the calendar conversation: Feb. 24<sup>th</sup> – March 17<sup>th</sup> will be the WC subcommittee presentations of department budgets. Themes to weave into subcommittee conversations include: Revenue Enhancements, Structural Reforms (examples include: having one labor lawyer to represent the entire town, consolidation of HR departments), State Mandates (Town Administrator Younger has requested a list from both the schools and town), cost cutting, and setting political priorities.

- ***Breakout into Subcommittee Meetings***

- Chair Curtis requested that each subcommittee meet briefly and leave this meeting with an elected Chair. The subcommittees then broke into groups.

- Subcommittee Chairs were elected as follows:

- Culture and Recreation: Member Lynch  
- Education: Member Bruschi  
- General Government: Member Millane  
- Public Safety: Member Paolillo  
- Public Works: Member Epstein

- ***Other***

- Chair Curtis moved to adjourn at 9:30 pm.

- Submitted by Lisa Gibalerio  
- WC Recording Secretary